

for info
furnished by
Mrs. Barlow

Mrs. Barlow was there
resting on Standish
Shore

Vandalism Cripples Another Historic Monument

Poor Miles Standish!
From Indian Fighting
To Battling 20th Century Youth

by Pat Barlow

A pleasant, leisurely bike-hike along Standish Shore in Duxbury; a pause at Eagle's Nest bridge to watch the tide trickle in; some hard pedaling up the hill called Crescent Road and we arrived at the entrance to the Standish Monument grounds.

The pre-season gate was locked to sight-seeing buses and cars, but pedestrian and bike traffic could easily pass through. The nearer we came to our destination — the monument of Captain Myles (or Miles) Standish — the less we could see of it. Somewhere beyond the ever up-winding road, tall banked evergreens and stepped drop to Kingston Bay was a stone tower, 116 feet high; atop it the statue of the pilgrim father who has presided over southeast Duxbury since 1899.

Captain's Hill, on which the monument stands, is itself 180 feet above the sea and the landmark can be seen from nearly fifteen miles outside of Cape Cod.

We had admired the monument from far and near; from Route 3 the statue's extended right arm points the way home for us. When the oak trees have shed their leaves, we can also see the Captain from our kitchen window. He is an old and familiar friend.

Until this warm April day in the Bicentennial year, we had taken Standish Monument for granted. The way we took the Liberty Bell for granted when we lived in Philadelphia; the way we took Fort Sumter for granted when we lived in South Carolina.

Because the landmark is so irrevocably there, and so much a part of our daily view, we did not think to include it on our list of pilgrimages-to-make. The over-sight was corrected when early warm weather and spring vacation tempted us outdoors to make a practice tour close to home.

Oddly, Standish Monument is not listed in many common reference books, although it is a Massachusetts State Reservation. We had hoped to make our first family visit to the monument knowing something about it. Instead, we had to discover the facts afterward.

As an educational field trip, it left a lot to be desired. As an exercise in togetherness, the trip made our day and taught the children some valuable lessons not to be gleaned from history books. The first lesson learned was the effects of vandalism.

Although there was evidence the spring clean-up had begun on the grounds (pruning, raking, etc.), there was broken glass everywhere. Perhaps a ton of what appeared to be the shattered remains of beer bottles, apparently dropped from the top of the tower. Not content with this obnoxious activity, the vandals further broke the monument's glassed and boarded windows, chipped away at the glazed brick interior, defaced bronze informational plaques and ripped cables loose. Throughout the tower, there was a considerable accumulation of trash and rubble, carved initials and scrawled, juvenile epithets.

The tower had no door (where one was obviously intended to be) to prevent anyone from climbing the spiral, mesh-enclosed staircase to the heights. Neither

was there any warning that the uppermost portion of the solitary railing had had its supports sawed off.

Approximately three stories up, we discovered the lack of dependable handhold and our curiosity turned to trembling fear. But having already climbed 125 steps perpendicular to secure footing, we decided to advance ... with even greater caution. This decision was helped by the fact that turning around on the narrow, shaky staircase would have been more dangerous than continuing.

At the top of the stairs was a catwalk which circled the interior of the tower. Four unguarded openings looked out on a wide sweep of bay, the ocean beyond and miles of inland territory.

From one we could see Marshfield, distinct as a treeless tundra where it squats on Massachusetts Bay. We could identify Plymouth by the Cordage smokestack out the opposite window and from a window in between, we marveled at the view of Clark's Island and Saquish.

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The wind was blowing hard from the sea and took our breath away, adding to our already considerable apprehension. Our nervousness had little to do with the height of the tower; it had everything to do with the structure's deplorable condition and the fear that the staircase would collapse at any time, given the reverberations of a faint echo. If only we had been warned!

The effort of the climb was nothing compared to the horror of the descent. Too late, we realized that traffic had to flow single file in the interest of safety and sanity.

There was no room for people moving in opposite directions to pass without some clinging to the wire mesh "cage" or ungrippable center stanchion. To our relief, no one was coming up as we wound our way down.

After setting foot on earth again, we murmured a prayer of thanksgiving. Not for the view we had enjoyed; not for the accomplishments of Myles Standish, nor for any other reason remotely patriotic. We were simply and profoundly grateful to have survived the tower.

It took a while before our knees were stable enough to make the bike ride home. While we convalesced in the picnic grove, surrounded by lush, manicured pines, we observed the other visitors to Standish Monument. Youngsters climbed the long, steep drive,



Now restored, the statue does not reflect Standish's true physique, which was short and broad.

skate-boarded down and climbed again to the vacant parking lot. Others wandered up Captain's Hill on their bikes, though anything less than a tensespider was walked, not ridden. A high school track team trotted up past the pines, red-faced and panting, in search of a water fountain. We had already criss-crossed the rest area and found none, though during the tourist season, water is available. In fact, the Duxbury water tank (which looks more like a celestial observatory) is only 200 yards from the base of the monument. Duxbury old-timers refer to the tank as "Mrs. Standish".

But while we watched people come and go, nobody ventured the monument's innersanctum. Either others weren't as curious as we had been or they were instinctively more prudent.

Admittedly, our adventure had been thrilling; much more interesting than staring down a hole at Plymouth Rock, we agreed. But we also agreed that we would rather give up touring forever than ever climb and descend Standish Monument again. Actually, the view from the base of the monument, from many spots on Captain's Hill, is most rewarding without ever treading an extra step.

According to a badly marred plaque (like all the others, inside the tower) Standish monument was built as a memorial by a dedicated group known as the Standish Monument Association. The plaque further stated that the care of the monument was transferred to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, August 6, 1920.

Now, 56 years later, it appears that the Commonwealth is unable to preserve this unique landmark against those who would wantonly and routinely mutilate it. In fairness to the Massachusetts Dept. of Environmental Management the cost of policing the monument beyond normal maintenance expenses would be prohibitive. The logical solution to this problem and the dangers inherent in it, is to seal the monument permanently.

A possible second solution would be to petition the federal government to put Standish Monument under its national park services before the monument and its grounds are surrendered completely to the whims of those who would destroy it all.

The day after our pilgrimage to Standish Monument, three juveniles were caught in the act of spray-painting the fourteen foot statue of Myles Standish a bright orange. In order to do this, these vandals had to climb out the topmost opening of the tower to the parapet above, very definitely risking their lives for the sake of an ugly prank.

The culprits were remanded to the custody of their parents who will probably have to reimburse the Commonwealth for repairs. Some Duxbury residents think a fitting punishment would be to have the children repair the damages themselves. However, these same people allow that this would be "too dangerous".

In the meantime, the vandals will no doubt be treated as heroes by their peers and it will surprise no

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one if others attempt to duplicate their "feat". The next incident, as well as the last and several before that, could easily spell the loss of life. The dangers are real, not the product of community hysteria.

Last July, two Commonwealth engineers visited Duxbury historian-author Dorothy Wentworth for the purpose of discussing the monument's preservation. It was decided at that time to seal the tower's apertures with stone and mortar. No attempt has yet been made to do this. However, park personnel did temporarily re-seal the monument following the aforementioned spray-paint incident.

In the course of tracking down the obscure saga of Standish Monument, historian Wentworth was the only one who remembered anything factual about it and able to produce substantial records.

The monument was first proposed in the 1860's by J. Henry Stickney of Baltimore, a great admirer of Captain Myles Standish. It helped considerably that Mr. Stickney had the wealth to support his interest, together with the money and influence of Nathaniel Adams and Dr. L. Miles Standish of Boston.

Appropriately, these gentlemen decided to build the monument on land once owned by the pilgrim captain; part of the original farm where Myles Standish lived and died. \$75,000 was spent on the structure before its completion in 1899. The cornerstone was laid in 1872 and reported to have been witnessed by an audience of 10,000. Considering the lay of the land, one wonders if this figure might not have been exaggerated.

An architect of the time, Alden Frink, designed the monument. It was one of a kind and considered a wonder and an inspiration in its day. Still, interest in the project waxed and waned for 27 years, as did the monies to build it. Over the years, the New England states each contributed a stone to fashion the door jamb. Blocks representing the counties of Massachusetts were laid to provide a circular base for the monument, which is 28 feet in diameter. And a Mr. S.J. O'Kelly of Boston went to work on the likeness of

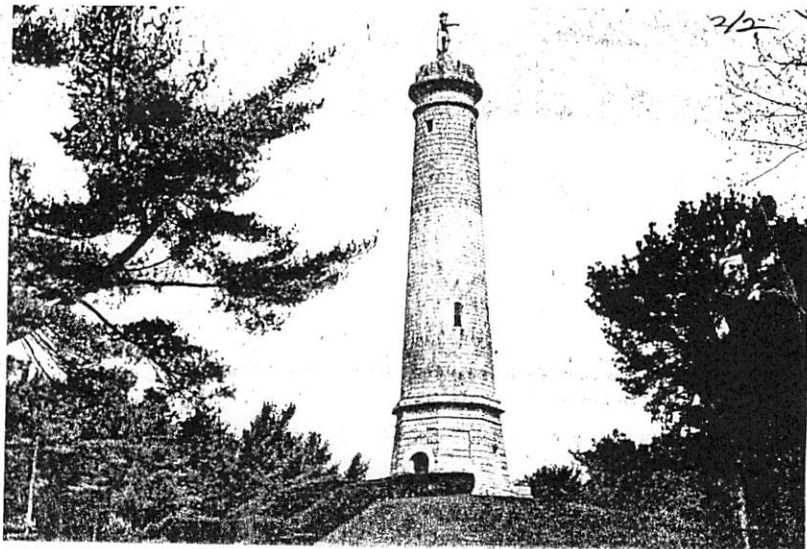
Poor Miles Standish! Not until 1930...was his likeness refurbished... Some Duxbury residents still cringe when they recall the macabre sight of the headless pilgrim.

Myles Standish that would grace the tower's top.

With all the hoopla and problems attendant to building the monument — a 27 year project, remember — it was considered a white elephant by 1920. Some wanted to tear it down; others wanted to let it fall down. By these sentiments and no doubt a great deal of politicking, did the monument come under the protection of the Commonwealth. Duxbury was relieved of a monumental burden and the capitol had one more dependent to add to its annual budget.

In 1922, two years after responsibility changed hands, lightning struck. The statue's upper torso was shattered, the granite blocks at the top of the shaft were loosened, lower windows were smashed to smithereens and the stepped walkway, leading to an encircling the monument was raised, cracked and rendered useless.

This bizarre and sensational stroke of nature captured the attention of the press for years after. Unfortunately, one old newspaper account contradicts the next. One writer, in a fit of *deja vu*, wrote eloquently of the storm that demolished Standish — in 1903. Another, suffering from an equal lapse in memory, placed the lightning attack in 1920. Other journalists ran the gamut between:



Estimates of the cost of maintenance for the monument and grounds approaches \$10,000 a year.

More to be trusted are the words of the delightful Willard de Lue, whose foot tours of Massachusetts were a Sunday favorite in the Boston *Globe* of the 50's — the 1950's. According to de Lue, whose research work was impeccable: "Lightening struck — literally. Standish's head toppled to the parapet and one arm plunged to the ground. For some years, the Captain's decapitated figure stood aloft while the Commonwealth pleaded poverty. The Art Commission added the indignity of an opinion that 'the statue is not a work of art.'" (Writer de Lue correctly dated the storm of destruction as happening on August 26, 1922.)

Yet another old headline (*Globe*, July 14, 1926) announced: "Myles Standish's new head to be clamped on this week". The article which followed indicated that the statue had been hit by lightning in 1924. It went on to sing the praises of sculptor John Horrigan (comparing him to Michelangelo) who had not only restored the dismembered top half of Myles Standish, but who had also crafted the Titanic memorial in Boston.

Writing for the day, the author of those jubilant words could not have foreseen certain obstacles. The statue's lower half was too wobbly to support the newly fashioned upper torso. There was still much work to be done before the heralded "clamping" would or could be accomplished.

Nevertheless, the statue's refurbished features were a faithful reproduction of historic drawings of the pilgrim's head. However, the body of the figure never has reflected (and still does not) the short, broad physique of Myles Standish as he was in life.

Poor Myles Standish! Not until 1930, or thereabouts, was his likeness refurbished and replaced atop the lower on Captain's Hill. Some Duxbury residents still cringe when they recall the macabre sight of the headless pilgrim. Navigators in Duxbury, Kingston and Massachusetts bays were surely as disconcerted by the sight of their favorite landmark so terribly diminished. But it wasn't anything that over \$10,000 in repairs couldn't rectify.

Today, local residents ruminate that lightning is an act of God ... hardly to be compared with the acts of

vandals. The vandals are denounced as members of the undisciplined, ungrateful, misguided and mocking younger generation.

In years past, Easter and summer services have been held at the monument by the Duxbury Council of Churches. Their secretary, Isabelle Sibillio, remembers climbing the original path to the monument as a child (before there was a paved road) to watch a solar eclipse: "In those days we didn't have special glasses, so we protected our eyes with dark strips of camera film."

Mrs. Sibillio further recalled Standish Monument as a glorious moonlight retreat for young lovers at eventide, and that in "those days", vandalism was the farthest thought in anyone's mind. Another Duxburyite of some 80-odd years remarked: "that was when romance meant spooning!" More lyrical in every way than contemporary necking and wrecking.

Undaunted by the monument's sad condition, the council of churches is planning a Bicentennial service there sometime this summer, to be followed by a family-style picnic. The date has not yet been set, but when it is, the public will be invited. Hopefully, the Captain's carved granite presence and his under-pinnings will have been made presentable (and safe) by then.

Whether Standish Monument and its grounds are thoughtfully used or thoughtlessly abused, the Commonwealth can only do as much for the public as allocated funds allow.

It is of little consequence (perhaps rightfully so) to the public that the monument is the tallest structure ever built to commemorate a single individual this side of Baltimore.

Gilbert Bliss, chief of recreation for the Commonwealth, estimates operation and maintenance costs of the monument at \$10,000 a year. This figure includes the salaries of seasonal employees who work at the grounds. Mr. Bliss confirmed Department of Environmental Management plans to secure the monument but added that the cost of rehabilitation and structural repairs would run in the neighborhood of \$100,000.

Some of this money is available now to begin repairs, but of deep concern to those in charge of the project is the probability that vandals will always be one step ahead of them. Mr. Bliss did not foresee any major improvements taking place this year, due to a shortage of engineering personnel.

"It would be a shame to seal the monument permanently," he said, "because it does have an important historical background, and the view from the top of the tower is magnificent."

Mr. Bliss also allowed that until the vandalism is controlled at its source, other important projects will be given priority.

It is certain that the defacers of the monument are local residents.

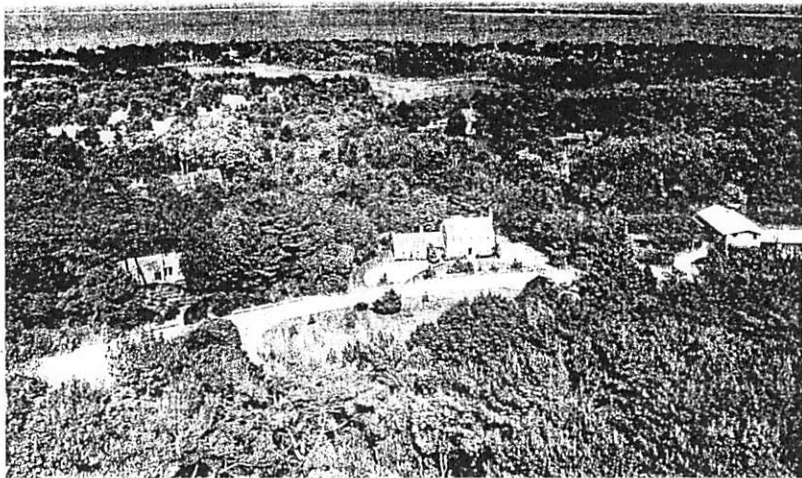
Russell Weeks, of the Myles Standish State Forest Division of the DEM, is also frustrated by the problems on Captain's Hill. "Our men patrol the area every so often, but it doesn't help," he said. If someone does call his South Carver office with a complaint, the damage is done before anyone can get there to stop it.

Then again, the monument is so isolated on its 20 acres of woods, that few people are aware of what is happening there. Duxbury Police also follow up on complaints when they receive them, but such calls are few and far between.

Addressing itself to the need for public information on Standish Monument and other historical shrines, the Department of Recreation has initiated an Interpretive Services Division (ISD). Superintendent of (ISD) Arthur Greenberg is in the process of writing a brochure on Standish Monument for visitors to the shrine which will be the first one ever available.

In years past, the site has been explained to tourists by guides, some of whom were more caught up in fancy than fact. It is hoped that the brochure will inspire greater local interest and respect for the valuable monument.

As of May 2, the monument grounds were staffed for the season. The official opening date will depend on how quickly certain basic repairs can be made. There is no fee for touring the preserve, but a state park standard charge of one dollar will be made for picnic and parking facilities. The grounds will close again after Columbus Day weekend.



On a clear day you can see forever. This is the magnificent view from the top of the monument.